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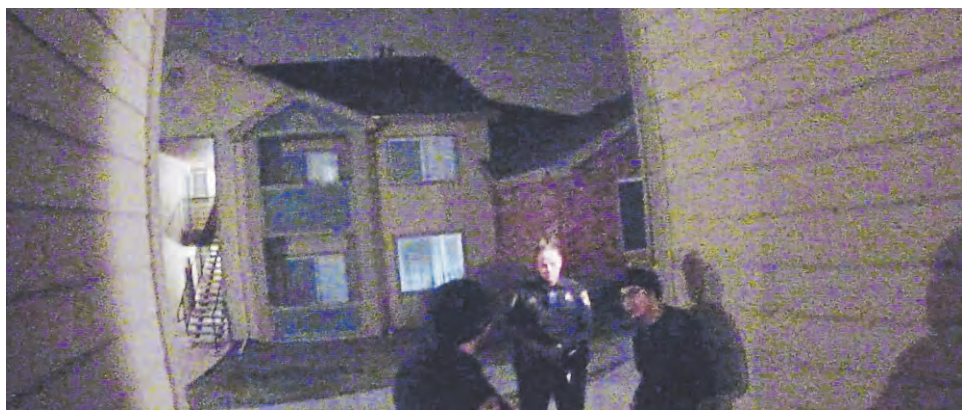
Officers' struggle: Go in? Walk away?

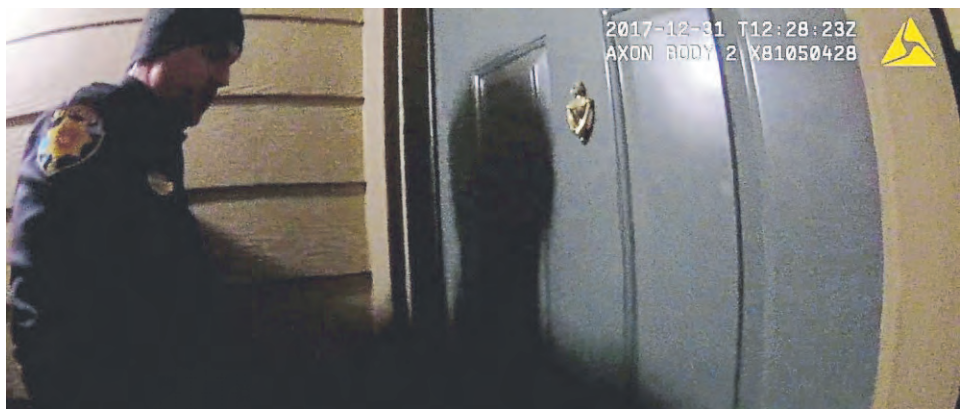
Fatal shooting reveals dangers of dealing with mental illness

By Noelle Phillips
The Denver Post



This video from body-camera footage shows Douglas County Sheriff's deputies talking with Matthew Riehl, right, outside his apartment after 3 a.m. on Dec. 31.

Riehl opens the door to his apartment to talk with sheriff's deputies after 5 a.m.



Deputy Zackari Parrish, standing outside Riehl's apartment, talks to him through the door after 5 a.m. (The body camera had an incorrect time stamp.)

About 7:30 a.m., SWAT team members stand outside the apartment complex where Riehl lived in Highlands Ranch. *Images courtesy of Douglas County Sheriff's Department*

In the hours before a fatal encounter with a man in the throes of a mental crisis, Douglas County Sheriff's Deputy Zackari Parrish listened calmly as the man's illogical ramblings fluctuated among screams, whispers and giggles.

The man bragged about his wealth, law degree and military service. He spoke about a quarrel with his lover and about robots and lasers. Parrish and his fellow deputies, having defused the situation, left without making an arrest or putting him on a mental health hold.

Two hours later, the man's agitation had escalated. The morning would end with Parrish and the man dead. Four more officers and two civilians would be wounded by gunfire.

When deputies arrived at 5:17 a.m. on Dec. 31, Matthew Riehl was making loud noises and met Parrish and Deputy Taylor Davis on the landing outside his apartment. He refused to allow deputies inside or to come outside to talk to them.

"Go away. Goodnight. Go away!" Riehl yelled amid his rants from behind a door he slammed shut. "Happy New Year!"

"Boy, he's manic," Parrish told Davis as he determined they needed to take Riehl into custody on a mental health hold.

Last week, Douglas County Sheriff Tony Spurlock released several hours of raw body-camera footage recorded as his deputies responded to calls at Riehl's apartment at 3 a.m. and 5:17 a.m.

The footage provides a first-hand view of how a deputy tried to handle an increasingly combative, unpredictable and argumentative person whose mind was not functioning properly. Law enforcement officers often must make quick, high-pressure assessments on how much of a public-safety threat the person poses and whether to back away or take them into custody. These encounters happen hundreds of times a year, sometimes with

SHOOTING » 18A

BRONCOS

Bowlen's successor remains on hold

Team trustees have plan to pick owner's heir, but "ifs" exist.

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Denver Post

One of the last photographs of Pat Bowlen was snapped as he walked off the field at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., before Super Bowl XLVIII on Feb. 2, 2014. His recently revamped Broncos had just completed the most prolific offensive season in NFL history, set a slew of team and individual records (most owned by quarterback Peyton Manning), won the franchise's seventh AFC championship and were back on football's biggest stage.

The Broncos would go on to get drubbed by Seattle, but when the camera flashed before the game, they were on top of the world. So Bowlen gave fans two thumbs-up.

His Broncos were OK. They were set up well. They had leadership he trusted and a foundation he had built.

BRONCOS » 17A

LIFE & CULTURE

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NATION & WORLD

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